

Speech by Mr. John Odum on the occasion of MEP International Conference
March 20, 1981.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the upper table, delegates, observes, Brothers and sisters in the struggle,

Permit me to introduce myself. I am John Oldum from St. Lucia a small island in the very important Caribbean, lying between 20 miles to the south of St. Vincent and the French island of Martinique 21 miles to the North West. I happen to be the Minister of Sports, Community Development, Social Services, Youth and Ecclesiastic affairs, not Tourism. So you have my blessing.

My Government is only 20 months old. I had the privilege of meeting the illustrious Deputy Governor Remie Zaandam in Mexico last year at an ODILAC meeting and again earlier this year in St. Lucia. I was invited by Brother Zaandam in my capacity of Minister of Sport to participate in the Aruba Mini Marathon which was on Wednesday of this week. The Prime Minister of St. Lucia the Right Honorable Alan Louisy was also invited by brother Zaandam to this conference. The Prime Minister requested that I represent him at this Conference since I would be in Aruba. The Prime Minister promised to write a speech and let me read it to you on his behalf, but that did not materialize. I am therefore taking it upon myself to make a few relevant observations on the subject matter "Political Development in the Caribbean" and I will be careful to stay close to home and not to roam too far.

I have gone through this introductory session to let you know that although I represent the Prime Minister at this Conference the brief contribution by me, may not necessarily be the voice of the Prime Minister. I am in fact utilising my democratic rights. I want to thank the MEP through its indefectible leader, Gilberto Betico Croes, for this invitation and to congratulate the Party on this special and important occasion of its 10th Anniversary, its 5th year in power and the honouring of its flag and anthem.

Also for its positive move towards rooting the idea of Democratic Socialism in Latin American and the Caribbean, while carefully forging its path to genuine Independence.

My country regards it a special honour to be invited to share these achievements with the Government, the Party and the people of Aruba, as it makes us feel like a legitimate sister in the Caribbean family.

There is a saying that speech is silver and silence is Gold, but I think that Communication is as precious as Oil is to day. Many beautiful speeches have fallen on deaf ears and the results are like seeds falling on stony ground. Speeches are usually followed by broad smiles and heavy applause, but no followup, no action and no re-action. Thank you in advance for the protocol of appreciation whether you agree or disagree, but I would be much more thankful for your action and re-action, since our genuine intention should be to help Aruba into a meaningful Independence based on Democratic Socialism.

Today, as one of the few English speaking representatives here, I feel it a special challenge not merely to speak but to communicate with you. Many of you don't speak English and this must be interpreted to you.

A decade is indeed a significant period and in these days of world uncertainty it is much more than a lifetime for many Parties and Governments and a considerably long period for others. Against this background I feel every legitimacy to congratulate you on this achievement which is a grand manifestation of your popular support which in turn can only come from understanding your people and their needs, their sufferings, their problems, their achievement their failures and most of all keeping them completely involved in whatever you do. Your recent overwhelming victory at the polls is manifestation of such practices.

It may be prudent to mention at this point a word of caution, no offense whatever but it has been proven that as the years roll by the more relaxed the Government or a Party becomes, and the almost inevitable cohesion is towards the easier way of life, getting them away into the more comfortable and luxuries sides and leaving the minority drifting slowly but surely from the ever important masses of the electorate who invariably are the greater sufferers and consequently, more in need of our attention, our association and our guidance. Good Government is good understanding of your people and their conditions. Keep the people in the forefront of every struggle and you can't go wrong. Your Independence will be a perfect example of this.

To take a brief look at the POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN it would reveal that the watershed in political development in the Caribbean came with the advent of adult suffrage in various Caribbean countries during the unsettled period of the 1930's. Then it came that one man had one vote. Prior to that it was the Crown Colony system of Government in which Colonial powers administered all the territories and your personal economic worth determined your voting strength for you qualification.

The decade of the Sixties started with the march to full sovereignty and Independence of some Caribbean States for example Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana Barbados and the efforts to find a system of regional integration culminating in the ill-fated Federation experiment. This left us with the historical phrase of the mathematical genius who said that one from 10 leaves north. This was quoted by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Eric Williams after Jamaica succeeded from the federation. We can pause here and take a moment to think of forming federations with other countries of meeting other groups and deciding on the value the merit or otherwise of joining with them. There can be very much danger in joining with other groups who do not understand you, who do not follow you ideology and who intent to mislead you.

Of the smaller Eastern Caribbean Territories there were some evolutionary steps taken to speed up the process of self-determination. The Associated States, (intended self-government with the Metropolitan powers retaining responsibility for External Affairs and Defense) that was given to the territories of Antigua, St. Vincent, St. Kitts, Nevis, Anguilla, Dominica, St. Lucia, Grenada and Monserat in 1967. It was given by the United Kingdom who ruled over them. Today most of the Associated States after almost a decade of apprenticeship in the management of their own affairs, have moved down to full Independence: Grenada, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent with the others on the threshold of full Independence. And possibly even nearer the entrance and under the portals our own dear host country Aruba.

We face some of the problems of Independence.

Economic Independence have been difficult to achieve, because of the size, the lack of natural resources, illiteracy, untrained manpower, imported-oriented trade, lack of energy resources, capital shortages, one-crop dependence etc.

We look at the Metropolitan attitude to aid and to trade in the face of their own inflationary problems.

We have the failure of Capitalist economies to correct the social and economic imbalances in our society.

The evolution of young people exposed to metropolitan standards of living (through the media) with insufficient economic opportunities realize such standard resulting in frustration, heavy frustration.

We have in some of our Windward Islands some of our Leeward islands, the problems of young people needing guidance, needing positive guidance and moving away from society forming various cults resulting in the rape of our countries. It is our job, it is our duty to collect the minds of these young people, to help them to mold themselves into young people with the meaning for the profiles which could be used for the development and betterment of the Caribbean, and if we fail to do that we are failing desperately in our jobs.

We have the Rastafarians who are a recent body of people roaming the Caribbean. They started in Jamaica, and they have moved all through the Caribbean. I want to say clearly that I have a certain respect for the genuine Rastafarians. But it is the imposter, the person who knows not really what the Rastafarians movement is all about, and who possesses as a Rastafarian to do his dirty deed. We are plagued by that kind of persons. Many of them happened to be University drop-outs and therefore they are able to talk and to influence other young people who have not had the opportunity of a formal education. We are plagued with drugaddictions, we are plagued with prostitution, we are plagued with good young people who want something to do and cannot find it. One of our heaviest plagues is unemployment.

The failure of earlier regional intergration movements, for example the Federation again, leaving the Caribbean islands still isolated and in competition with each other in aid and trade.

The impact of the Super Power, the rivalry on the newly independent territories. The ideological pluralism resulting from all of that. Some Caribbean countries are revolving Socialist model societies, while others are Western (Capitalist) Parliamentary democracies. And the more important is the attitude of some small islands towards the possible solution, the non-dignment movement. Even those who uses the pat phrase "I am neither left nor right I am just dead centre. When it comes to aligning with the non-aligned it boils down to the law of the lobby: which Metropolitan super power weighs heavier or has the most say as we say in the Caribbean which one comes stronger and the hand goes out and accept.

The exportation of our mental resources in seek of a bigger pay packet resulting in a brain drain in our island. And back to the attitude it is extremely important that our small Caribbean area pools its resources, rather than encourage fragmentation by in-fighting and ostracizing our neighbors like in Grenada and in Cuba, because of their ideological machinery for moulding more independent and sturdier young people ready to face the large exploiters. The story goes far and wide that you should stay away from Grenada, you should stay away from Cuba, you should not follow those people. It is amazing how some small Caribbean Countries will protect the machinations, the plans and experiments that is to protect them of Metropolitan country. They protect them even stronger than Metropolitan country itself would do it.

You also have some which will take with both hands and claim that they have no prejudice in aid. We look at the situation where our brother Maurice Bishop, I remember when the ambassador for the U. S. was living in Barbados. It was her attention to find out what made the island click. How were they looking, how ripe are they for the picking, how long must we wait and when she was courting with brother Maurice Bishop ourselves in St. Lucia, Dominica, we had Barbados using the big stick on brother Bishop and his other Minister and not allowing them to land in Barbados. That is the example which I had to use the other day on the television screen when I was telling the gentleman, Mr. Jerry Francis, that sometimes the acolyte is stronger than the priest. But I never get the opportunity to tell him that they are both weaker than the Bishop.

To all appearances in today's struggle if you cannot be manipulated you will be emasculated and some glaring examples closer to home are in Grenada and Cuba. What were the so-called parent Countries doing about the suffering masses when Eric Gairy of Grenada was having his field day and denying Grenadians their right and their freedom. The super powers looked on with quiet consent. But now that Bishop has boldly come forward to take the bondage out of their land, all the quiet ones are making disproving noises, but Grenada and Bishop stands firm and I congratulate them on that. In my humble opinion, America will never outlive the humiliation brought upon itself, when it underestimated the value of the people's power and attacked the little Cuba. Only to be defeated with all its war mongery and heavy artillery by a united cutlass swinging nation a mere island, a handful of people bound together with determination did the job. This is an example to us.

In Aruba's move towards independence it must take example and courage from such historical photos and prepare its people educate its masses as we saw Betico in action on Wednesday nite, because we have seen the mistakes of many independent islands and countries, with very dependent people in them and that is farcical. It is a folly to make your country independant and keep your people dependant. They must be the independant ones. As the word implies the people must be able to be independant and free to follow the straight and narrow way, not be dictated to by the imperialistic powers.

I must admit that the situation expressed by many previous speakers have fanned my fire and put fuel in my fight. For their history is my future and we must all take action to be the Master of our own Destiny.

Thanks to Aruba and Curacao, they are providing the means for many of our people in the Caribbean to be able to earn the pay packets to become qualified and now to be in positions to serve in the top ranks governments in the Islands.

We can look back on Grenada and see the produce of Gairy, in St. Lucia and see the produce of Compton, in St. Vincent and see the produce of Cato and I'm sure there is one (in Dominica)

But as decades go, people go, unless there is some kind of continuous education and therefore with the ever-changing times that crop of men seem to have had its day. and the new regime comes forward to grapple with the bussiness of the Caribbean. A new breed of man must be discovered, trained, unearthed, for a proper system of Government to serve the masses in the various parts of this Caribbean. Today especially, when we have a few examples here in the immediate, Caribbean of the infiltration of the Super powers with their attractive cash flow.

The absence of many countries which were invited may be a reflection of such infiltration and imposition on their freedom. Even in small domestic examples these erosions are manifest e.g. the labouring masses may give full support to a Party or Government but they get employment by some foreigner from the Capitalist regime who because he doles out a meagre minimum wage packet to her or him at fortnight or month end has incredible influence on his or her political allegiance and you soon hear these farmers or domestic workers, employees expressing doubts about their life-long believes in the Government or a party. You get the simple minded taxi driver who happens upon a sharp tourist and at the end of a tour or trip sings a new song praising the pro-Imperialist.

We as Caribbean and Latin American leaders have a mount of task ahead of us, because we are limited to local technology of educating and counselling our people and followers while the Capitalistic Infiltrators are trained in the modern methods of Divide and Rule.

Starting from the very top and going completely thru the social order we need to do a complete job of preparing our people for the withstanding of the Enemy. We have suffered too long and too much from half done jobs on half baked people. Today I am a disappointed man because of a Political Domestic Situation in my country whereby the very politicians who fought alongside with me in the Struggle are themselves falling prey to the absolute corruption of power that is the diary of half baked jobs and the only solution is a complete purging of the system.

The worse bite one can get is from a dog in his own house.

Let this serve as an example not only to Aruba in its present struggle but to all the other Brother Countries pledged to Democratic Socialism, to realize the weaknesses of each other and work towards bolstering them. However the good book says if your right hand offend you, you must cut it off. And regardless of however painful it may be that is the ultimatum answer.

It is indeed difficult to fight or to match our determination against the weapons of the super power which is mainly money, but true support and confidence in the struggle is our only weapon so far and we must use it ad-infinitum.

Our presence here today should be evidence of our support for the struggle in which Aruba, the Caribbean, Latin America and indeed the third world will find itself but even among us there may be some doubtful bretheren balancing on the edges of uncertainty and I challenge any such fence sitter to tip the scales and let justice prevail. And while on the point of our presence here today, it may be necessary to note that the objective is not only to educate ourselves or to Socialize at this function.

This conference can make or break our goals of de-colonization, self determination and freedom. As friends and brothers of Aruba, the Caribbean Latin America and the struggle please realize and remember that "a friend indeed is a friend in need" and when Aruba will need to call upon us for our support, we will be like the wise virgins with well trimmed wicks in our lamps, ready to throw not only light but support on the matter.

Like good boy scouts we must always be prepared to play our parts in helping each other to 1. decolonizing, 2. attain self determination and 3. Freedom.

Brother Bishop called for Peace yesterday, yes but along the path of peace Brother Bishop, we must be prepared for war.

In the Caribbean today the underground war wages heavily, the Super powers see us like oysters on the ocean bed waiting to be picked up, but little do they realize that some of the pearls are priceless and cannot be bought like Pride and dignity we must be priceless when we are sure that we are fighting the right fight to freedom. There is more honour in a dignified death than in aimless existence. When you look at my flag outside, you'll notice St. Lucia towards the extreme left, smaller than all the others, but flattering like any other one, good things come in small parcels. And even the small ones thought to be peaceful, we know when we must be active, like the volcanos in our country, after a while when we can't take no more, we erupt.

Yesterday, some of our Caribbean Atletes participated in Aruba's first Mini Marathon, they run long distances for glory, for exercise, for trophies, but on the world political scene there are many men in their ripen years who are forced to run marathons upon marathons for their own lives and therefore possibly for the balance of their lives they will be fugitives some for good deeds and some for bad deeds but what greater love is there then to lay down one's life for the struggle towards the betterment of this world.

Among us today there are men who have fought hard in the struggle and lost things and people most dear to them. We have our brother from Guatemala, we have next to us the Aruban born Prime Minister of Grenada - Maurice Bishop whose father was shot down like a common dog by the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalistic regime.

Who is next no one is quite sure and this is why we must band ourselves together as people with a common goal to fight against such repressive elements and to protect the interest of the masses.

Brother when the masses are with us, it's hard for us to be conquered and who am I to tell Maurice Bishop what is best for his masses and vice-versa. Aruba's peace may not grow in Grenada on Grenadian soil, but with the Aruban Oil and the Grenadian nutmeg, much can be done for the Caribbean.

At this stage I wish to offer my solidarity in the fight and to wish all the best results from this conference for the betterment not only of Aruba, but all the Caribbean, for

PEACE AND LOVE PROGRESSIVE TOGETHERNESS AND CONTINUED POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD'S GUIDANCE. PAZ Y AMOR PROGRESO Y UNIDAD Y CU PODER DI DIOS UN RELACION CONTINUO Y POSITIVO.

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